

**OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE USE
IN GUNNISON**

Hunting With ATVs - Responsibility or Regulation?

Updated June 11, 2001

The use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) during hunting season has skyrocketed in recent years. ATVs offer several advantages -- they are easier than walking, they cause less impact than most other vehicles, they can access terrain that would turn back other vehicles, and carrying an elk out on the back of an ATV is easier than carrying it out on foot.

There are also disadvantages to the use of ATVs. Because they are easier than walking, more people are hunting from their ATV rather than on foot. The noise and smell of an ATV can alert game animals from a long way off so your chance of seeing game from an ATV is very small. And that same noise and smell that is chasing deer and elk away from you is also chasing them away from any other hunters in the area as well -- this can create very hard feelings among hunters who used stealth and stalking skills to get into good habitat only to have the deer and elk scared off by ATVs!

Because ATVs can get into terrain that other vehicles cannot, some riders are making improper use of that advantage and creating an extensive network of new roads and trails in areas that were previously roadless. This causes increased impacts to vegetation and soils. It also creates a path to tempt other recreationists to follow until those faint tracks through the meadow become a full-blown road. The elk in that area are then subject to year-round disturbance. Big-game hunters should be aware that a half-dozen studies have clearly shown that elk avoid vehicle activity associated with a road or ATV trail. Other interesting tidbits from these studies show that:

- Elk use declines in areas adjacent to roads for distances ranging from 0.25 to 1.8 miles, depending on the amount of traffic, the quality of the road and the density of the vegetation and topographic cover next to the road. In general, greater traffic flow on higher quality unpaved roads produces a larger area of elk avoidance.
- Slow moving vehicles on primitive roads and trails are more disturbing to elk than fast moving vehicles on a highway.
- As road and ATV trail density increases in an area, the quality and size of the elk habitat declines significantly, which eventually affects the quality and size of the elk population. A road density of 3 linear miles of road per square mile of ground seriously reduces the value of that area for elk, and a road density of 6 linear miles per square mile can reduce elk use to zero.
- When vehicle use during hunting season reaches a certain threshold, elk will abandon that area completely and head for inaccessible areas such as private land or wilderness areas. The result is

that road and trail proliferation and persistent use of vehicles during hunting season is cutting down all hunters' chances of bagging that elk and it is degrading the habitat of the very animal they are hunting.

Responsibility or Regulation - The Choice is Yours!

So what does this mean for the typical hunter with an ATV? It's simple - it means responsibility versus regulation. If, as a group, ATV users are irresponsible with the use of their machines, then there will be increasing pressure on land management agencies to restrict ATV use during hunting season. Already there are groups, most notably other hunters, that are asking for a total ban on ATV use during hunting season. In other areas, regulations have already been established that limit ATV use to certain times of the day and then only to retrieve a harvested animal.

Nobody likes regulations, but if irresponsible ATV use continues to cause unacceptable impacts then regulations will become necessary to ensure the protection of the public lands. A better alternative would be for ATV users to recognize the impacts their activity can cause and voluntarily take steps to reduce those impacts. ATV users are not unique in this respect -- as more and more people use public lands for recreation, the potential impacts of these activities are growing fast. Virtually all recreation users -- jeepers, horse enthusiasts, rafters, snowmobilers, hikers, campers, rock climbers, motorcyclists, fishermen, and mountain bikers -- are being asked to reduce the impact of their activities so the public lands can be enjoyed by both this generation and by future generations.

What can *you* do to reduce the impact of ATVs during hunting season?

Here are a few tips.

- Know the vehicle regulations for the area in which you are hunting.
- Stay on existing roads. Do not contribute to elk habitat fragmentation by creating new paths for others to follow. If existing ATV routes are poorly placed (*e.g.* straight up a hillside) and causing erosion problems, don't make the problem worse by continuing to use those routes.
- Get off your ATV to hunt. It will increase your chances of success and cause less disturbance to the other hunters around you.
- The best use of an ATV during hunting season is to recover the animal once it is down. Do this during the middle of the day (11am to 2pm) to reduce the impact on other hunters. ***If vehicle regulations permit***, you can take your machine off existing roads for this purpose as long as you aren't causing resource damage by doing so.
- Have respect for other users. Slow down or stop your ATV when you approach riders on horseback so you don't spook the animals.
- Limit your use of ATVs in wet areas or during wet conditions. Even though the lighter weight and broad tires reduce impacts, ATVs can still do serious damage to wet areas.
- Keep your machine tuned and properly muffled to reduce exhaust noise.

- Don't widen single track trails by forcing your ATV down the trail.

These are simple things, but they can go a long way toward reducing the impact of ATV use. They will also help to protect the habitat and herd health of Colorado's magnificent elk. And with diligent self-policing, they will help prevent the need for more regulation.

***Tread Lightly!* on your ATV**

| | |
|--|--|
|  <u>General ATV Information</u> |  <u>Lake City ATV Information</u> |
|  <u>Lake City ATV Trail Map</u> |  <u>Lake City ATV Trails</u> |
|  <u>Lake City ATV Brochure</u> (<i>requires Acrobat Reader - <u>download it here</u></i>) | |

[GFO Recreation](#) | [Gunnison Field Office](#)

[News](#) | [Information](#) | [What We Do](#) | [Recreation](#) | [Directory](#) | [Offices](#) | [BLM Facts](#) | [Museum](#)
[Search](#) | [Browse](#) | [Home](#) | [FAQ's](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Disclaimer](#)

www.co.blm.gov/gra/gra-atvethic.htm
Last modified: June 11, 2001

Created by the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado
Point of Contact: [Arden Anderson](#)